



Northwest Physical Therapy

Changing lives... One step at a time

Northwest Physical Therapy Newsletter

CURRENT CONCEPTS - BACK PAIN

It is estimated that 80% of the human race experiences low back pain at least once throughout their lifetime. This is a well known statistic and experience with patients in both physicians' and physical therapists' offices.

Research suggests that low back pain is not as innocuous as previously reported. The results of recent studies indicate that the recurrence of pain is common in 60-80% of patients with low back pain (1), and that approximately one half report pain and disability at 5-year follow up (2).

Additional research indicates that patients with chronic low back pain experience muscular atrophy of the multifidi and transversus abdominus muscles - two key back stabilization muscle groups. It is hypothesized that these muscles act as the body's own "natural back belt" and with pain and atrophy, dysfunctional movement and potentially harmful forces are placed on spine by the larger erector spinae muscles.

Physical therapists often address episodic pain and weakness with a variety of therapeutic exercise programs. Lumbar stabilization employs a series of exercises that target the atrophied muscles mentioned above. While attractive in theory, recent literature indicates that a well rounded general exercise program of the trunk muscles may be the most attractive model used to address episodic low back pain. (3)

Further research will continue to shed light on the most appropriate treatments for low back pain. But for now, we can safely conclude that low back pain is common, reoccurs in at least half that are afflicted, and a good trunk strengthening program can decrease pain and disability in the short term.

1. Skargren EI, et al. One-year follow-up comparison of the cost and effectiveness of chiropractic and physiotherapy as primary management for back pain. Subgroup analysis, recurrence, and additional health care utilization. *Spine*. 1998 Sep 1;23 (17):1875-83
2. Enthoven P, et al. Clinical course in patients seeking primary care for back or neck pain: a prospective 5-year follow-up of outcome and health care consumption with subgroup analysis. *Spine*. 2004 Nov 1;29 (21):2458-65
3. Koumantakis GA, et al. Trunk Muscle Stabilization Training Plus General Exercise Versus General Exercise Only: Randomized Controlled Trial of Patients With Recurrent Low Back Pain. *Phys Ther*. 2005; 85:209-225

TOTAL REHABILITATION PATIENT TESTIMONIAL

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"...a good trunk strengthening program can decrease pain and disability in the short term."